

CLAIMS:

10. (currently amended) A method of testing samples, the method comprising the steps: inserting a volume-adjusting insert into a sample vessel, the volume-adjusting insert comprising a top and a bottom defining an axial direction, a septum seal in an upper portion of the insert, a reduced-diameter portion having a close fit with an outside diameter of a penetrating sample deposit/extraction device and communicating with a bottom end of the insert between the septum seal and the bottom end of the insert, a conical guide disposed between the septum seal and the reduced diameter portion, and a seal surface on an outer surface of the insert for sealing an inside seal surface of the sample vessel, the seal surface of the insert, reduced-diameter portion, and a bottom portion of the vessel defining a reduced-volume sample chamber as compared to the sample vessel alone;

positioning a penetrating sample deposit/extraction element above the insert;

inserting the penetrating sample deposit/extraction element through the septum seal, the conical guide, and into the reduced-diameter portion to a depth sufficient to provide axial alignment of the insert and the sample deposit/extraction element; and

transferring a sample fluid between the sample deposit/extraction element and the reduced-volume sample chamber.

11. (previously amended) The method of testing samples of claim 10 wherein the steps of positioning a penetrating sample deposit/extraction element above the insert and inserting the penetrating sample deposit/extraction element through the septum seal, the conical guide, and into the reduced-diameter portion is performed before the step of inserting a volume-adjusting insert into a sample vessel so that positioning the insert for insertion into the vessel is performed with the sample deposit/extraction element through frictional engagement of the sample deposit/extraction element and the septum seal.

12. (previously amended) The method of testing samples of claim 10 comprising the additional step of utilizing hydraulic pressure generated by the penetrating sample

deposit/extraction element to transport the sample fluid through the insert and out of a bottom-extraction opening of the sample vessel.

13. (currently amended) The method of testing samples of claim 12 comprising the additional step of passing the sample fluid through a processing element disposed between the ~~through-chamber~~ reduced diameter portion and the bottom-extraction opening.

17. (previously added) The method of testing samples of claim 10 wherein the sample vessel is one of a plurality of wells in a tray.

18. (previously added) The method of testing samples of claim 17 wherein each of said plurality of wells in a tray comprises a bottom extraction opening.

19. (currently amended) The method of testing samples of claim 10 comprising the additional step of withdrawing the insert from the vessel and positioning the ~~sample~~ insert to another processing location by frictional engagement of the sample deposit/extraction element and the septum seal.

20. (previously added) The method of claim 19 wherein said another processing location is another vessel.

21. (currently amended) A method of testing samples, the method comprising the steps: inserting a processing device into a sample vessel, the processing device comprising a septum seal in an upper portion of the device, a reduced-diameter portion defining an axial direction of the device, having a close fit with an outside diameter of a penetrating sample deposit/extraction device and disposed between the septum seal and a bottom end, and a conical guide disposed between the septum seal and the reduced diameter portion; positioning a penetrating sample deposit/extraction element above the septum seal of the processing device;

inserting the penetrating sample deposit/extraction element through the septum seal, the conical guide, and into the reduced-diameter portion to a depth sufficient to provide axial alignment of the sample deposit/extraction element and the device; [and]
transferring a sample fluid between the sample deposit/extraction element and the vessel;
and
moving the device to another processing location by frictional engagement between the sample deposit/extraction element and the septum seal.

22. (currently amended) The method of claim 21 wherein a processing element is disposed in [the] a bottom portion of the device, and the sample fluid is transferred through the processing element by the sample deposit/extraction element.

23. (previously added) The method of claim 22 wherein the processing element is an adsorbent element.

24. (previously added) The method of claim 22 wherein the processing element is an absorbent element.

25. (previously added) The method of claim 22 wherein the processing element is a filter.

26. (previously added) The method of testing samples of claim 21 wherein the steps of positioning a penetrating sample deposit/extraction element above the septum seal of the processing device and inserting the penetrating sample deposit/extraction element through the septum seal, the conical guide, and into the reduced-diameter portion is performed before the step of inserting a processing device into a sample vessel so that positioning the device for insertion into the vessel is performed with the sample deposit/extraction element through frictional engagement of the sample deposit/extraction element and the septum seal.

27. (previously added) The method of claim 21 comprising the additional step of withdrawing the device out of the sample vessel by frictional engagement of the sample deposit/extraction element and the septum seal after the step of inserting the penetrating sample deposit/extraction element through the septum seal, the conical guide, and into the reduced-diameter portion.

28. (cancelled)

29. (previously added) The method of claim 26 comprising the additional step of withdrawing the device from the sample vessel and moving to a different processing location through frictional engagement of the sample deposit/extraction element and the septum seal, is performed after the step of transferring a sample fluid between the sample deposit/extraction element and the vessel.

30. (previously added) The method of claim 29 wherein the moving to a different processing location comprises the additional step of inserting the device in a second sample vessel.

31. (currently amended) The method of claim 21 wherein the device comprises a first septum seal and a second septum seal in [the] a bottom portion of the device and comprising the additional step of inserting the sample deposit/extraction element through the second septum seal after inserting a penetrating sample deposit/extraction element through the first septum seal, the conical guide, and into the reduced-diameter portion.

32. (previously added) The method of claim 21 wherein the sample vessel is one of a plurality of wells in a tray.